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[Education dept.]

PAPER ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES

—READ BEFORE THE—

PROVINCIAL TEACHERS' INSTITUTE, REVELSTOKE, B. C.,

—BY—

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SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

At this day, it should not be necessary to advance arguments in favour of the establishment and maintenance of a library in every public school. But, just to fortify ourselves, let us hear the opinions of several eminent educators:

Horace Mann:—"No one thing will contribute more to intelligent reading than a well selected school library."

Dr. G. Stanley Hall:—"The school has no right to teach how to read without doing much more than it now does to direct to the taste and confirm the habit of reading what is good rather than what is bad."

Sir Joshua Fitch:—"Until a good library is attached as a matter of course to every one of our elementary schools, a great opportunity of refining the taste and enlarging the knowledge of the young will continue to be wasted, and the full usefulness of those institutions will remain unattained. After all, it is the main business of a primary school, a chief part of the business of every school, to awaken a love of reading and to give children pleasant associations with thought of books."

Joseph Baldwin:—"Carlyle has said that the true university of these days is a collection of books. It is an education to know *how* to read and *what* to read. The school does its best work when it develops a taste for the best literature and fosters the reading habit. Men of thought as well as of action get their inspiration from books. A choice school library wisely used doubles the efficiency of the school."

Further, the library movement of the present day adds another reason for having school libraries. The public library has come to be regarded as a necessity, and rightly so, for it can be [illegible] the great educational forces of the land. The library wants trained readers, [illegible] mainly the duty of the school to provide this training. So important has this factor come to be regarded in the United States that Dr. W. T. Harris, Commissioner of Education, has gone so far as to say: "The school is set the task of teaching the pupil how to use the library in the best manner—that, I take it, is the *central object* towards which our American schools have been unconsciously tending." Dr. Harris thus makes the school to be merely an adjunct to the library.

Eminent educators then, regard the library as an essential part of the equipment of a school. And it is, therefore, safe to repeat that a few shelves of books—well chosen, that is, some for entertainment and inspiration, others for information—and well used—come very near doubling the efficiency of a school. It is not to be wondered at that children whose reading habits receive little cultivation should have no love for books, at least for those books which are wholesome and helpful. Nor, at this point, should we forget that the golden opportunity to cultivate the taste for reading and to direct it into proper channels is afforded in the elementary schools. It has been found that commonly the desire to read becomes strong about 8 years of age, increases steadily to 10, then rapidly from 11 to 14, culminating about 15, after which it often declines. The home, the school, and the public or school library, working in harmony, should be able to provide for the child's needs in this matter. And again, the opinion is offered that "every school should have its own little collection of choice books adapted to

the stage of development of the children, and in the periods of leisure before school, after school, at the rainy day recess, or in leisure moments of finished lessons, the children should be allowed to use these books freely."

A university would not presume to exist, except on paper, without reference books in the different departments of literature and science. A high school, before receiving recognition as such, should also include a library as part of its equipment. Now, as far as I know, but two of the eight high schools in this Province have much more than a mere beginning in this direction. While this is hardly creditable in the case of our high schools, the situation of the other schools in this respect is even worse. Of the several hundreds of graded and common schools now in operation throughout the Province, it is within the truth to state that not fifteen possess a small collection of books which may be dignified with the name of "school library." The establishment of these libraries, too, has been owing to the generosity and intelligence of a few city school boards, as well as to the efforts of teachers interested.

It will thus be seen that with a school system thirty-two years old, British Columbia has made but little progress in this field, in fact, scarcely a beginning. And the probability is that until the Legislature takes some action and grants some pecuniary assistance, the progress in the establishment of school libraries will be extremely slow and unsatisfactory. If there is any doubt as to the wisdom of such a course on the part of the Legislature, let that honourable body look abroad for evidence of the great value attached to education through libraries, and observe the readiness of other enlightened Governments to appropriate public moneys liberally for the purpose, with the full approval of the people.

Throughout Canada and the United States, various plans have been adopted for securing libraries for schools, but only one can be said to have succeeded.

Under the *permission plan*, school boards are authorised to appropriate a certain sum yearly for the establishment and maintenance of libraries. This plan is varied by permitting the ratepayers to vote each year as to whether any sum shall be expended for library purposes. There is no instance where under this system even half the schools have secured libraries. Nova Scotia has this plan, but the 113 school libraries in that Province, worth $17,875, are found mostly in the wealthy sections drawing an extra grant on account of class of teacher (one condition of the extra grant being the possession of a library).

Under the *duplication plan*, the state, under certain limits, votes a sum equal to that raised by local tax for libraries. In Minnesota, after books are purchased by the local authorities, a suitable book-case provided and a librarian (generally the teacher) appointed, a certified statement is sent to the State Superintendent of Education and thereupon requisition is made upon the State Auditor for one-half the amount expended, but no district can receive more than $20 the first year and $10 each succeeding year. A similar Act (called the Library Act) is in force in New York, but in neither State are more than half the schools reported to be supplied with libraries. Two years ago, the State of North Carolina passed a law appropriating $5,000 from the State funds to be paid out $10 to every school district that would appropriate $10 and whose citizens would contribute $10. The State Superintendent not long ago reported that the $5,000 was taken up in three months and that the State proposes to renew that vote ($5,000) every year until every school and every boy and girl has access to the best literature of the world. In Ontario, regulations approved by Order in Council as late as last July, provide that any rural school board which purchases a library for the pupils shall be entitled to a share of whatever money may be appropriated for the purpose by the Legislature, if it purchases such books as are contained in the approved list. The grant, equivalent to half the sum expended, is not to exceed $10 in any one year. Ontario, you will notice, has just begun this work in connection with its common schools. In New Brunswick, wherever a

school district raises a sum of money for establishing a library, or adding thereto, the Board of Education may grant to it a sum equal to one-half the sum so raised, not to exceed $20 in any one year. In 1899, only 24 of 1,771 schools in that Province were reported as purchasing books. In Connecticut, the State makes grants to districts or towns for libraries, on condition that a like sum is raised or expended. This is a somewhat more liberal regulation than those already mentioned, and it has provided more than half the schools with libraries.

Under the *mandatory plan*, school trustees must set aside annually for the purchase of library books a certain per cent. of the school grant apportioned to each district. In Wisconsin, the treasurer must withhold annually for the purchase of library books an amount equal to 10 cents for each person of school age residing within the district. In Iowa, from five to 15 cents, as may be ordered by the board, is withheld for each person within the ages of five and twenty-one years, for the purchase of library books. In California, the County Superintendent must set apart for district libraries not less than 5 per cent. nor more than 10 per cent. of the county school fund annually apportioned to the district. In cities, the library fund consists of a sum not to exceed $50 for every 1,000 children or fraction thereof, between the ages of five and seventeen years. Under this plan, *nothing* is left to local initiative and a library is actually secured for every school. The latest addition to the ranks of those following the mandatory plan is the North-West Territories. In 1901, a section was embodied in the School Grants Ordinance making it compulsory on the part of all districts to expend a small sum annually for the purchase of books. The section reads as follows:—"The Board of every district receiving a grant under clause 3 of section 3 hereof shall expend one-half of the amount of such grant in each and every year on the purchase of books for a school library, and such books shall be selected from a list authorised and furnished by the Department."

To show what has been accomplished in consequence, it need only be mentioned that the estimate of grants under this head for 1901, to 275 schools, was $5,154.93. One-half of this amount, or $2,577.46, must, last year, have been expended in procuring libraries for the schools of the North-West. Even before the passing of the Ordinance referred to, 105 districts had provided libraries containing some 4,229 volumes, and all brought about by the successful efforts of teachers alive to the importance of having a small library of books suitable for school children.

It is almost unnecessary to state that none of the plans outlined has been adopted in this Province. In fact, our school system in its present form is scarcely prepared for the general adoption of any one of these plans. But it does seem possible to adopt the *duplication* plan for *rural* districts and the *mandatory* plan for *city* districts.

Now, in order to apply the duplication plan in rural districts, it would be necessary to obtain pecuniary assistance from the Legislature. Since 1898 a grant of $500 has been annually made by the Legislature for "travelling libraries." A system of travelling libraries is an excellent thing, and there are now no less than thirty-nine, of a hundred volumes each, in use in this Province. But the claims of the rural school children ought surely to be regarded as of more importance than those of all the adults whom these libraries can possibly reach. Consequently, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that if no additional sum can be voted by the Legislature, the "travelling library" grant be applied for a few years at least to the purchase of libraries for rural schools on the duplication plan similar to that adopted in the State of Connecticut. Let the boys and girls of the rural schools carry away with them the reading habit as one of the most precious gifts of the school system. Children who form a taste for good literature are reasonably safe, both intellectually and morally. "The person who has learned *how* to read, and not *what* to read, is placed in a position of great danger."

The application of the mandatory plan to city districts might be effected through the Government grants made on account of high schools, and the attendance of all pupils. This plan could at least be applied to high schools by declaring that the equipment on which the grant depends shall not be considered satisfactory unless it includes a suitable library of reference and other books.

It may not be out of place to mention that another plan not yet referred to or outlined in this paper has been tried with excellent results in several city districts of the interior. It may be designated as the *voluntary* plan. Within the past year the school boards of Grand Forks, Nelson and Rossland have expended sums of money in the purchase of libraries for their respective schools. Both the high and the graded school of Nelson are now provided with small libraries, which will, in all probability, be added to from year to year. The action of these school boards is certainly worthy of imitation, and fully proves the value of the fourth or voluntary plan, which, of course, requires funds, generosity and intelligence for its successful application.

There is another phase of the library question which is important and which seems to present some possibilities in this Province; I refer to the helpful co-operation of the public library with the public school. This, as you know, is possible only in cities which have large free public libraries, such as New Westminster, Vancouver and Victoria, and it would, undoubtedly, do much to solve the school library question in these cities. For instance, the Victoria High School is now pressing for a good library of reference books for teachers and pupils. Why should the city hesitate to establish in the High School building a branch of the public library containing the books asked for? In fact, all our public libraries should be managed so as to help the local schools in every way. The time has surely gone by when the librarian is merely a custodian of books; he must now seek alliance with the teacher, his co-worker in the educational field. It is not too much to say that the public library which has no connection with local schools is neglecting its mission and ignoring one of its noblest opportunities. But how is this connection to be brought about? It may properly be regarded as the duty of the local school trustees who should approach the managers of the libraries and secure their co-operation in the work of education. Or, better still, the local school board should be represented on the board of managers of the public library. Such co-operation should lead to the opening in the public library building of school reference rooms or school departments, with books for teachers as expert workmen on special lines, books for the immediate work of the child as well as for his work after leaving school, projected along the same lines as those set forth in the course of study itself.

The hearty co-operation of the public library with the public school is one of the most noticeable features of the modern library movement in the United States. The utmost anxiety is there displayed to have the library assist the school in every possible way. Teachers are supplied with teachers' cards, allowing them to take many books at a time and to retain them for a long time. Classes are supplied with books, and boxes of books are carried from school to school. All the public libraries of California recognise the needs of the boys and girls. San Francisco Public Library opened a juvenile department in 1895. In that city, more than 15,000 children's books are circulated monthly.

The old city of Brookline, a wealthy suburb of Boston, extremely conservative in almost everything but education, has, through the efforts of its Education Society, practically brought the public library into the schools. A school room has been opened in the public library building and made the headquarters of school children. The person in charge of this room assists and instructs school children in the use of the library and reveals its resources. Books selected by the school committee (that is, board of school trustees) are collected in this room,

especially books adapted for the use of school children and such as throw light upon their studies. These books are at the command of teachers and are sent to the school-rooms upon their requisition, on the principle of the travelling library. All the other books and resources of the library are accessible to the school children, under proper restrictions. Classes of pupils are taken to the school-room in the library for lectures and instruction. The school librarian visits the teachers, learns their needs, and encourages a more general use of books, other than the regular text-books, in the school-room. Thus the public library is brought into the schools, for the school children are made familiar with the use of the library, given systematic instruction in the use of books, and encouraged to form the habit of using a library. In Los Angeles, all the city school libraries were, as early as 1891, deposited in the public library building and placed under the care of the librarian and his staff. Both teachers and pupils were thus given access to a larger number of volumes. In 1897, a school reference room was established and copies of many valuable books of reference secured. In addition to books, the school department of the Los Angeles library has a large collection of mounted pictures for concrete illustration of lessons. Besides this, groups of pictures of interest in connection with various holidays, current events and occasions of note are always displayed from time to time in this department. On the occasion of my visit early in 1901, pictures of our late beloved Queen (then recently deceased) were on exhibition to teach the young American the history of one of our greatest sovereigns. The rooms were crowded with children just from school, who were selecting books or drinking in information through the eye from the pictures of the day. In this way the people of Los Angeles have the schools and the library working together in the utmost harmony, and accomplishing the maximum amount of good upon the minimum amount of money, time and energy.

Thus far in this paper the effort has been to justify the need of the school library by giving the opinions of several well-known educationists of eminence, to outline the plans adopted elsewhere for securing such library, to suggest means of applying two of these plans to this Province. But for all this outpouring, it may still be necessary for us to be content with the means at our own disposal. If such prove to be the case, we must then look back upon teachers and trustees as the prime movers in this work. Already several teachers, alive to the value of a few shelves of books in their schools, have raised sums of money by subscription or by school entertainments and purchased small libraries. It is in this way that each of such schools as Cranbrook, Ducks, Fernie, Kaslo, Sandon, Trail and Vernon became possessed of a small collection of books (not always well chosen, however) to serve as an additional educational influence in the district. Where there is a will there is always a way, and the excellence of the way will generally be in direct proportion to the energy of the will. A useful library for a rural school can be purchased for $20 to $25; a $10 library (or even a $5 one) should not be despised. After raising a small library fund by either of the means just mentioned, the first difficulty to confront the teacher will be the proper selection of books for the varied needs of the school. This difficulty will no doubt be met by the issuance, as in other Provinces, of a catalogue of books recommended for public school libraries. It is necessary to seek such guidance so that the library may be organised with a definite view to future growth, as well as with a clear purpose to make it contribute to the school activities and to foster the intellectual life of the children.

To the teacher, the library, however small, can be made a most important auxiliary. To himself, it may be a source of entertainment, inspiration and instruction, and if it is not such, neither he nor it should be there. No teacher can use a library to advantage who does not care for its contents. To entertain or inspire others, he must be entertained and inspired himself. The pupil can, through the medium of books, be brought into touch with thoughts and ideals whose influence once felt can never quite be lost. The mind is not only to be

exercised, but, like the body, is to be fed also. But it is not my purpose to pursue this division of the subject any further, that is, to continue a discussion of the value of literature in education or the educative value of the use of books and the responsibility of the school in inspiring and directing that use. That is really another story which will, no doubt, be told at length when the problem of securing a library for every school in the Province has been satisfactorily solved.

Revelstoke, B. C., April, 1903.

VICTORIA, B. C.:
Printed by RICHARD WOLFENDEN, I.S.O., V.D., Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty.
1903.